March 18, 1952

Dr. C. B. van Niel
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Pacific Grove, California

Dear Kees:

I hope you will excuse the embellishments on the envelope, but I have been warned by several of our mutual friends that this was the only way to approach you as a correspondent. I hope you will tolerate this impertinence: I fully realize how distracted you must be with your multifarious duties.

I am writing, of course, in reference to my previous letter of December 5, 1951, concerning the possibility of spending about two months this summer at the Marine Station. We will badly need a change from Wisconsin problems, and propose to spend this time working at a different place, and on slightly different material. There are a number of possible projects— one that I now think might be of special mutual interest would be acgenetic consideration of the Athiorhodaceae. Perry Wilson has suggested that Rhodospirillum rubrum might be a quite workable organism to see what could be done with mutational experiments. I would be especially interested in the problem of the genetic interrelationships of the chromophoric plastid (?) system to the rest of the cell, but there are a number of ways in which mutant-searches might at the same time give biochemically interesting types. Although I would be grateful for your interest, I think that we could probably set up so as to constitute a minimum distraction.

If the idea of our visit is not entirely distasteful to you, I would appreciate your setting us in the direction of proper and necessary arrangements, and telling what part of the summer would be the most advantageous. If such a visit does not seem feasible, please let us know by the enclosed return envelope so that we can try to make alternative plans (although none seem nearly so attractive).

To change the subject altogether, genetic work with E. coli has taken a new slant. We had previously thought that K-12 was a completely homothallic, sexually undifferentiated system. But all the time, under our very noses, there has been the workings of a rather complex system that approaches a combined physiological and genotypic control of mating reaction, much as in some of the chlorophytes., I don't think we will ever clear it up entirely with our present approach.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg